We claim:

- 1. A method for characterizing the risk of future cancer mortality for an individual, comprising the steps of:
- (a) obtaining the level of the patient's serum total bilirubin;
- (b) comparing the obtained level to a predetermined level for serum total bilirubin; and,
- (c) characterizing from the comparison the risk of future cancer mortality for the individual.
- The method for characterizing the risk of future cancer mortality for an individual according to claim 1, wherein the predetermined level of serum total bilirubin is 0.66 mg/dl, and wherein levels near or below 0.66 mg/dl indicate that the individual has a higher than normal risk of future cancer mortality.
- 3. A method for characterizing the risk of rheumatoid arthritis for an individual, comprising the steps of:
- (a) obtaining the level of the individual's serum total bilirubin;
- (b) comparing the obtained level to a threshold level for serum total bilirubin; and,
- (c) characterizing from the comparison the risk of rheumatoid arthritis for the individual.
- 4. A method for characterizing the reduced probability of future cardiovascular disease, future cardiovascular

mortality, future cancer mortality and future all-cause mortality for an individual, comprising the steps of:

- (a) obtaining the level of the individual's serum total bilirubin;
- (b) comparing the obtained level to a predetermined level for serum total bilirubin; and,
- (c) characterizing from the comparison a reduced probability for future cardiovascular disease, future cardiovascular mortality, future cancer mortality and future all-cause mortality for the individual.